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ABSTRACT

Scholars in the field of communication theory and research have ignored and problematized the relationship between sign and meaning. This paper discusses the relationship in order to catalogue the different positions taken and to investigate the work that gets done from these positions. In the "brute sense data" or physicalist position, the character of the sign is responsible for encoding, decoding, and interpretation. The perceptionist position occupies a broad region, noting only certain discrepancies in the reception and interpretation of sensory information, speculating on perceptual realities only loosely connected to sensation. The constructionist draws the conclusion which the perceptionist resists: if perception intervenes between understanding and the phenomenal world then humans must be active participants in co-constructing the world they believe in. The hermeneuticist places meaning in the successful expression of power. For the physicalist and the perceptionist, signs have meanings independent of their creation; for the constructionist and hermeneutist there is nothing prior to semiotics in understanding and meaning is a cultural production. Two tables accompany the discussion and present the relationship between sign and meaning in the realms of sign production and interpretation for each of the four positions. (Contains 45 references.) (AEF)

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ED 393 433

THE ROLE OF INTERPRETATION IN COMMUNICATION THEORY

by
James A. Anderson

In American baseball, there are there positions on the crucial issue of umpiring balls and strikes:

"I call them as they are."
"I call them as I see them."
"They aren't anything until I call them."

Scholars working the fields of communication theory and research have variously ignored or problematized the relationship between sign and meaning. It is, of course, the fundamental relationship upon which all such theory and research findings must rest. As with most fundamental notions it remains characteristically unsettled (Sheriff, 1989). Philosophers of science are generally harsh in their appraisal of an early resolution. W. V. O. Quine (1953) argues that we can hardly know "what we are talking about" and Roth (1987) declares that there is no proof of meaning. Nonetheless both write, a performance which offers at least tacit agreement that something can both be said and read.

Sign and Meaning

This paper is an attempt to break into the relationship between sign and meaning, not with any intent at a resolution, but to catalogue the different positions taken and to investigate the work that gets done from these positions. It is Peirce's notion of the triadic nature of the sign which begins our difficulty. Peirce sees the semiotic nature of the sign being filled by its (a) material trace (the physical work, symbol, icon, etc.), (b) semiotic object, and (c) the relationship and its *recognition* between the trace and its object.

Questions are raised as to the manner in which material facts produce a signifying potential, the character of the semiotic object and the nature of the relationship that mediates sign and signifies as well as the possibility and its extent of our control over that relationship. These questions are raised at both points of focus within communication, the realm of symbol production or the move from the cognitive interior to the semiotic export and the realm of symbol interpretation or the move from the exterior sign to some conscious or performative understanding.

In the realm of production, the questions are generally these: What is the unformed resource, for example, of the words on this page? Who is the meaning maker? What is the site of the work of encoding? What are the resources of meaning making? How are those resources made available to the meaning maker? What is the necessity of intent? What is the formulation of an intent to mean? What is the recognition of the resources to accomplish that intent? How is its satisfaction accomplished (encoded in sign choice)? And where is its realization?

In the realm of interpretation, the questions might begin with: How is the sign recognized as a sign? What are the structural/genetic/learned/idiopathic components in that recognition and subsequent interpretation? Who is the meaning maker? What is the site of interpretation? What role does production intentionality play in sign recognition and sense making? What is the character and moment of semiosis? How are the resources of semiosis engaged? What is the nature of the product of semiosis? What is the conclusion of the interpretive event or task?

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Communities of Answers

There are, of course, extensive literatures on nearly everyone of these questions, and we will do no more than touch the surface of each. One way to begin this analysis is to describe the central points along the range of positions from which answers have been developed. These centroids (if you will) can be plotted across the degree of determinacy in sign character, encoding, decoding, and interpretation. (Comparisons of this sort can be found in Outhwaite, 1987; Teichman, 1988; and Terwee, 1990, among many others.)

On the Far Right: Naive Empiricism and Brute Sense Data

We might begin at the most determinant position, one that has been dubbed the "brute sense data" or physicalist position. This position echoes the naive empiricism of Bacon, Locke, and Hume in that phenomenal world is a set of natural signs which represents a set of true conditions (Teichman [1988] provides a fair review of this argument). In this position, the character of the sign is wholly reputable and is responsible for encoding, decoding, and interpretation. Language and other constructed signs can be literally true. Something can be meant and encoded without error given an act of nature or the proper level of competence. Semiosis is the "natural" decoding operation of the sentient instrument which is a trustworthy observer of the sign and its encoded meaning. Interpretation is an elaborated understanding of the sign in its setting and the purposes we have for it. It is directed by right reasoning.

We can recognize this physicalist position from the close of the sixteenth century, and clearly see it as a fundamental argument of empirical science yet today. It has resisted efforts to tear it down but its erosion has been in earnest since the partitioning of the mind by Freud and Jung and the partitioning of reality by American pragmatists and continental scholars. Nonetheless, behaviorism was and remains the obvious restatement of the primacy of the stimulus. Many studies in communication, particularly effects and literacy studies, reflect the behaviorist tradition and are conducted "as if the brute sense data position were true" while the authors would probably demur that "of course it's not."

The "as if" portion of that claim is upheld by any study which (a) holds that content has a definitive meaning, (b) treats content as the delivery system of that meaning, (c) declares content to be the agent of some consequence in an audience, and (d) treats the audience as a reactant. Such studies have adopted an "as if" stance on the physicalist's site. The researcher first asserts both an ontological and praxeological claim by declaring content to be something--violent, pornographic, scary, informative, persuasive--to someone else. The subsequent behavior of the someone else is attributed to the content exposure. Examples of these "as if" studies would include the classic Berkowitz (e.g., 1963) and Bandura and respective colleagues (1961, 1963) studies as well very recent ones by Phillips (1983), Rosenthal (1986), Wilson (1991), and Zillmann and Bryant (1982).

Breaking the Connection: The Introduction of Perception

By the close of the nineteenth century, the general belief in the unmediated character of sense data gave way to the recognition that human understanding required a perceptual process to intervene between sensation and cognition. Continuous sensory data had to be perceptually organized for us to experience the world's phenomena. Encoding was no longer wholly dependent on the character of the sign and there was slippage between encoding and decoding, so that the sign and its interpretation were no longer one. Perceptions were (and generally are) nonetheless considered to be authoritative representations of actual phenomena although error and bias can occur.

There arose a large class of studies which examine the perceptual process--the whole Gestalt school, for example. These studies hold perception to be an orderly, reliable process with predictable failures (any of the bent line perceptual tricks) and problem areas. (As an aside it should be noted that any declared failure has to be judged against a more privileged perception. A line, therefore, is straight to the ruler but bent to the eye and the choice of which one is true is conventionally made.)

Perception has also been used to indicate a subjective response. Studies of this sort have titles like "Perceived fright values of horror films by 8 year olds" or "Perceived attributions of gender differentiated characters by adult males" (for an actual example see David [1992]). The implied argument is that there are either real fright values/attributions (e.g., the classic "knife in the hand" study) or that there is no objective basis for claiming particular fright values or attributions, and consequently the ones expressed by the respondent groups is a characteristic of their taxonomy (for an example, see Frost & Stauffer, 1987).

The subjective is further developed in studies which use "relevance triggers." These studies (e.g., Inyengar, 1979) attribute differences in outcomes to devices which serve to position the respondent (usually by reminding them of some doctrinal stance).

Both are arguments that one's vision of reality is marked by social conditioning[1], but at the same time, because the researcher can determining the real or the objective such markings can be resisted by the well trained. That this good training can be extended to others is one of the principal tenets of media education (Anderson, 1980). It is seen in training efforts to produce the skills that result in the right perception of deceptive or otherwise inappropriate media fare.

Perceptual processes are also the underlying support for interventions in which one message (and resultant understandings) is to form the basis of the perception of some subsequent presentation (see Donohue, Henke, & Meyer, 1983). Such studies are extensions of the forewarned is forearmed principle. For example, children who had the opportunity to handle real earthworms prior to their exposure to a film clip which depicted a giant earthworm monster had reduced fear responses (Weiss, et al., in press). The prior exposure was seen as directing the effect of the film.

The precept that perception is a requirement of human understanding has general acceptance among the scientific community. Its application, however, varies widely.

In the majority of effects studies, its operation is either ignored or considered to be a constant across all respondents. This transparent perceptual process is effectively a return to brute sense data. When perception appears in effects studies, it is often used as a marker of respondent typification by class, gender, race, education, and the like (e.g., Zemach & Cohen, 1986). These typifications are accomplished by differentiated responses to material which in itself is considered perceptually neutral across these categories of influence. The operation of perception, then, is considered a constant across type.

In some studies, the issue of perceptual error or bias is inserted (e.g., Vidmar & Rokeach, 1974). Perceptual bias must necessarily imply some alternative non-biased position from which it can be viewed. Usually this position is that of common sense (held by the researcher).

Relevance triggers and intervention studies offer a more complex application arguing that perception can be shaped at the moment of reception of the focal message. The step beyond these studies is the argument that perception must be shaped (and is, therefore, in each and every case somehow shaped) at *any* moment of perception. Nonetheless, the

potential of that step shows perception to be the social science equivalent to the deconstructionist subjectivity--the relevance trigger as interpellation.

Perception puts the character of the message at the point of reception in play. Beyond the rules of competent production, the perceptionist has little to say about the message as encoded. In most perceptual analyses, that encoding is fully justified by authorial intent (it is a different community which introduces polysemy).

The legacy of naive empiricism is clearly seen in the loose and friendly way in which perception offers its presence to research. It imposes no requirement too account for its operation, but one can use it if desired. Researchers are free both to hold to perceptual processes and to presume that they have no effect, that treatment messages can change perceptions but research protocols will not, that others are subjective but researchers are not, that the untrained are biased and the trained are true. A more difficult presence would require, at the least, researchers to abandon any claim of what a message is prior to its interpretation by a target audience and would compel the analysis of that interpretation in any study of effect.

Perception remains, at this writing, a theoretical device to solve anomalies which have arisen in testing the central empirical claim of a generally unmediated engagement of phenomena, material, and semiotic. There is little evidence as to material operation. As Bolles (1990, p. xi) notes, "Not only do we not know how perception works but we haven't a clue as to how it might work." Its character in theory and method is firmly in our own hands.

Creating the Semiotic Object

In most perception studies, we are looking at the perception *of* something. Theres is a material, factual object with a reality independent of the perception per se. This is the independent character of the signified. For example, Pettersson (1988) speaks of a "figure" which becomes the number 13 when placed in a sequence of numbers and the letter B when placed in a sequence of letters. It, however, pre-exists as a figure before it is perceived as a letter or a number.

The theoretical break between material and semiotic objects comes with the claim that the figure's existence as a figure is also a perception. Indeed, all objects are the product of the sign. The material facts of their existence are the bounded persistences of reflection, refraction, absorption, and the like. Those boundaried persistences become what can be known when they are coalesced into a semiotic object. (A relationship of persistences becomes a chair only in the presence of a mind, although the relationship continues even in the mind's absence.)

This move changes the phenomenal world from a world of material objects to a polysemic world of material semiotic potentials. In this latter world, there are material foundations for what is seen, but what is seen is always the product of the mind (Gibson [1966] and Sacks [1993] call this the creation of a perceptual self).

While images of Berkeleyism and trees falling in the forest may dance in our heads, there are positions in this phenomenological constructionism which work in the same way as the physicalist's brute sense data. One need only to posit universal rules governing the relationship between material potentials and resultant semiotic objects to return us to the beginning. We start to move toward the wonderland of Lewis Carroll when we release the semiotic object from the universal sentience (or at least universal human sentience) of Peirce and Husserl and (a) cultural processes enter in the equation, so that the same material foundations are used to produce culturally different semiotic objects (culturally different boundaries of color is the usual example); (b) the semiotic object is greater than the material foundation can warrant (pictures might be an example); (c) the

material foundation is itself a set of human practices which must be understood semiotically (the idea of justice).

We move closer to the Red Queen when by defining the semiotic object as the set of socially determined understandings in play for some material foundation (what Crapanzano, 1992 calls "centering") in some cultural era or, more radically in some community of understanding. By putting what is signified in play, we affirm the social construction of reality and open the door to different ways of thinking across generations and communities. The result is that collectives of the same ostensible language group use the same material resources of semiosis to achieve in their well-practiced and naturalized methods different worlds of everyday life (Morely's [1980, 1986] work in caste based understandings of soap operas a good example). The sign remains reliable (within limits of perception) within a community but not across communities. The question remains as to the size, scope, quality, and character of reality defining collectives. Were one finds an answer in this liberation of the jointly-held mind to create the reality of its understanding is the defining point of theoretic and methodological ontology.

Whatever one's ontological position, the constructionists ferrying of objectivity from the phenomenal world into the realm of collectively governed cognition changes a number of fundamental tenets (a good development of these is in Seung [1982]): Reality is no longer universal and is determinate only within community boundaries (even if the boundaries encompass us all). The individual is no longer the measure; the collective stands in that place. We no longer perceive a preexisting object but create a perception out of possibilities. The adjudication of error is no longer from a standard independent of the researcher. In sum, the trustworthiness of the sign as well as its ability to drive an interpretation are reduced to collective boundaries, and encoding and decoding are volatile practices as they migrate across those boundaries.

The Final Deconstruction: Attacking the Character of the Sign

Remembering that the Peircean sign is composed of a material trace (natural or composed), the object for which it stands and the acknowledged relationship between the two (Noth, 1992), our work to this point has been to consider the manner in which the material trace is recognized in perceptual processes and the methods of social construction by which the semiotic object is formed. Throughout those two analyses, once the material trace is grasped in perception, its object (however achieved) is presented in a reliable relationship. I have called this trustworthiness of the sign. I believe it reasonably represents, along with perception and social construction, a significant boundary among different theoretical communities. We are about to cross that boundary.

Our philosophic guides are the likes of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Kierkegaard, Husserl, Heidigger, Gadamer, and of course Derrida, but we also gain direction from American pragmatists, social interactionists, and interpretive sociologists. In crossing the boundary we abandon any transcendent relationship between sign and meaning. Instead we focus our efforts on understanding how a sign is always in the process of becoming meaningful, always in the process of creating the relationship between what can be recognized as the possibility of understanding and what can be understood.

From Derrida, ("Speech and Phenomena," 1972) to Barthes ("Pleasure of the Text," 1975) Eco ("Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language," 1984) to Caputo ("Radical Hermeneutics," 1987) the hermeneutic position--this position of the other side--argues that signs are the contingent means of managing the flux of the present. Signs rather than being referential are encyclopedic. They reach out in every direction in an infinite

potential which can be but partially realized in any instance. Signs are the command to make meaning in a collectively recognizable, local performance of sense making.

What something means, therefore, is answerable only in the present, only at the site of considerable efforts which provide for its construction and must be answered anew at the next asking. That answer will have to take into account the tension between collective efforts to sustain meaning (through persistent and overlapping performances) and the necessity of its local and partial expression by some agent[2] of that collective. These requirements in no way deny that retinas respond to light energy in predictable ways, that brains reliably recognize the stimuli of their perceptions, and that minds are shaped by culture and the practices of socialization. They simply claim that retinas, brains, and minds are not enough to understand meaning. One must also understand action for it is in action that meaning may become.

Now before we all drift out of sight, the methodological consequences for this theoretical stance are (a) to establish the framework of on-going effort which permits meaning construction as the target for our methods; (b) to nominate methods which reveal on-site the material practices of that effort; and (c) to recognize that the facts revealed are themselves the product of some other framework. Using collective resources, the agent meaning maker achieves some local understanding. That local understanding can be repeated elsewhere and by others but that repetition is its own work.

Hermeneuticists have divided along two lines: One, following the phenomenological trail, has held to the primacy of language in constituting consciousness. The other, more existentialist, has held to action as the means by which the self appears. This theoretical division has shown itself in the practice of scholarship by the appearance of textual based critical analysis (Carey, 1989; Huck, 1993; Grossberg, 1984) and performance based interpretive ethnography (Anderson & Goodall, in press; Anderson & Meyer, 1988; Goodall, 1991; Rose, 1990).

When scholars abandon the trustworthiness of the sign, they are faced with the continuous study of the methods of the production of collective resources, of one's access to them, of the subjectivity of agency, of the authority of action, and of the voice of its extension. All the while they are called to realize that they are the authors of this knowledge and subject to the same analysis. As in "Fatal Attraction" nothing is finally submerged, but, knife in hand, rises again and again.

An aside: To put a fine point to it: For the latter day hermeneut, were Herb Zettl to make a claim about the meaning of visual vectors, he would be making a claim of what *ought to be* rather than what it is. His writing and scholarly life *would go about the work of making it so* (even to speak from the mountains of Delphi). Claims of meaning are the unending work of claims to authority.

An Overview of Positions

We have looked at four more or less separate positions from which to compose answers which might address the questions posed at the start of this discussion. They are the physicalist, perceptionist, constructionist, and hermeneuticist arguments. The physicalist view is one of an organic machine reliably responding to independent empirical phenomena which drive isomorphic representations of consciousness. Language is a genetically based system of representation of phenomena and pre-existing categories and the extensions of both.

The perceptionist can occupy a broad region, at one end very close to the physicalist, noting only certain discrepancies in the reception and interpretation of sensory information, at the other, speculating on perceptual

realities only loosely connected to sensation. Language remains a genetically based system of representation of phenomena and preexisting categories but can be enlivened (or corrupted) as well by perceptual variation.

The constructionist draws the conclusion which the perceptionist resists: If perception intervenes between understanding and the phenomenal world, then we must be active participants in co-constructing the world we believe in. Language has physical foundations and formal structures, but its system of representation is a practical human achievement--a given in which we all enter and contribute.

The hermeneuticist takes the step beyond metaphysics and puts it all in play as the struggle for meaning is the work of everyday life. The placement of meaning is the successful expression of power. Language is physical, structural, and representational but its meaningfulness is not in genetics, structures, or representations (any combination of signs can be made meaningful) but in its material presence in action.

A Collection of Answers

Tables 1 and 2 present our initial questions concerning the relationship between sign and meaning in reals of sign production and interpretation respectively. The Tables provide short references to the questions and rather cryptic answers which allow us to see the points of difference but do grave injustice to even a marginal articulation of these complex issues. This injustice is somewhat rectified in the sections that follow which enlarge the answers provided.

The Realm of Symbolic Production

Unformed Resources

The major contrast is between the physicalist/perceptionist pair and the constructionist/hermeneutist pair over what's prior to the semiotic. For both the physicalist and the perceptionist, the semiotically unformed resource of understanding is a verifying phenomenal world which can be engaged in an objective fashion. Signs have meanings independent of their creation. The shadings between the two deal with the degree of mediation involved in the engagement of this objective reality.

For both the constructionist and hermeneutist there is nothing prior to semiotics in understanding (see Wertsch's 1985 overview of Vygotsky and Bakhtin). What we know of the phenomenal world, we know semiotically. Meaning is a cultural production. The differences between this pair have to do with the security of meanings. For the hermeneut meaning is never secure but always open

Questions:	Physicalist	Perceptionist	Constructionist	Hermeneutist
Prior Resource	Empirical Reality	Perceived Reality	Semiotic Achievements	Collective Achievements
Meaning Maker	Automonous Rationality	Perceiving Subject	Situated Subject	Acting Subject
Encoding Site	Individual	Individual	Ideological Collective	Agent in Collective
Intent	Required	Required	Utilized Not Required	Part of the Action
Resources	Genetic	Genetic and Cultural	Human Accomplishments	As Available in Action
Intent Accomplished	Proper Encoding	Perceptually Encoded	Rhetorically Encoded	Coherent Action
Intent Realized	Proper Decoding	Perceptually Decoded	Rhetorically Decoded	Local Utility

Table 1. In the Realm of Production

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to innovation, opposition, and resistance.

Meaning Maker

Answers to this question show a steady decomposition of the monadic self. From the universal representor to the nominated, contingently acting subject, the meaning maker becomes more and more collectivized and requires more and more description to understand that instrument of sense-making. For example, while it is true that a person wrote these words, the question remains as to whether he was acting autonomously or as a cultural agent or as a tool of collection action.

Encoding Site

Again our pairs split, this time over the primacy of the individual and the collective. The right hand holds encoding to be the creative act of the intending individual. The left holds that the encoder is a clerk of the collective whose invention is wholly derivative.

The Questions of Intent

The role of intent for the physicalist and perceptionist in symbolic production is to establish the motive for production and the "right meaning" for the text as well as the basis for judgment concerning the proper encoding and decoding. This position requires a belief that intent is prior to the text and extractable from the text (for an extended discussion of the necessity of intent, see Avramides, [1989]).

Intent need serve no validating purpose in domains of the constructionist and hermeneutist. For the encoder, intent may well arise after the symbolic product has been formed and may subsequently be revealed in the on-going action. For the decoder, intent is a device used to advance a particular claim of meaning or to execute some interpretive performance. In both cases, intent is an invention not a determinant.

The Realm of Interpretation

Sign Recognition

In the first two categories sign recognition is a function of the incoming information. The concept of an adequate stimulus is one which excites the sensory nerve. It is that excitation which is recognized and its object source reproduced or perceived.

Table 2. In the Realm of Interpretation

Questions:	Physicalist	Perceptionist	Constructionist	Hermeneutist
Sign Recognition	Adequate Stimulus	Adequate Stimulus	Difference Boundaries	Difference Boundaries
Sign Interpretation	Hard Wired	Hard and Soft-ware combos	Practical Accomplishments	Actional Accomplishments
Meaning Maker	Sensory System	Perceiving Subject	Situated Subject	Acting Subject
Site of Interpretation	Individual	Socialized Individual	Ideological Collective	Social Action
Semiosis	Sensory Engagement	Perceived Stimulus	Ideological Engagement	Action Engagement
Semiosis Engaged	Liminal Stimulus	Cognition Initiated	Collectively Managed	As Initiated in Action
Authorial Intent	Directs Interpretation	Directs Interpretation	Point of Comparison	As Required by Action
Semiotic Product	Isomorphic Representation	Perceived Representation	Positioned Representation	Contigent Interpretation
Interpretation Conclusion	Moment of Sensation	Cognitive Recognition	Enactment of Subjectivity	Enactment of Acting Subject

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In the latter two categories the incoming information has to be punctuated to be recognized. Objectification is first step of interpretation, provided for and driven by collective resources.

Sign Interpretation

Sign interpretation shows a decomposition similar to that of the meaning maker. We move from the universal electro-chemical operations of neurons (which is the singular definition of literal meaning) to an increasing differentiation and collective implication of the interpretive performance as a local and partial product of the acting agent.

Meaning Maker

As in the production realm, the physicalist is clearly separate from the rest on this question as that position works for system rather than subject answers. The remaining positions will necessarily construct a responding subject, self-contained for the perceptionist, collectively invoked for the constructionist, and implicated in social action for the hermeneutist.

Site of Interpretation

An inside/outside split characterizes the difference between the right and left pairs. For the first, interpretation "happens" in the individual in sensory or cognitive processes. For the second pair, interpretation is collective achievement prior to the individual whose role is evocation or enactment.

Semiosis

Semiosis--that moment of semiotic understanding--occurs for the physicalist at the moment of neural response, for the perceptionist at the formation of a perception, for the constructionist at the moment the sign is ideologically positioned, and for the hermeneutist at the moment of becoming in action. Our first pair offers a "behind the eyes" definition which is strongly dependent on the individual as the acting unit. Our second sees semiosis as a collective process in which the individual participates but cannot achieve on its own.

Semiosis Engaged

The physicalist defines semiosis engagement as the moment a gate passing stimulus is presented. That is insufficient for the perceptionist, as cognitive structures (variously called values, attitudes, schemata) must be brought into play. Therefore it is the implication of these structures which signals the engagement (and for some the terms) of semiosis. Both of those definitions are far to interior for many constructionists and certainly hermeneutists who want to emphasis the "out front," material practices of the collective requirements and directives of what we can come to understand.

Authorial Intent

True decoding in the physicalist and perceptionist camp must follow the requirements of authorial intent be it natural or human. Decodings accounting for intent in the remaining two are simple variants of the possible with no particular veridical standing.

Semiotic Product

We divide our pairs on the issue of representation versus interpretation. (An interesting discussion of representation meaning can be found in Gillet, 1992.) Neither constructionists nor hermenuetists may innocently claim representation. There is, for neither, nothing independent of the semiotic to represent. A sign is the interpretation of another sign. Any representation, then, is a practical accomplishment of semiotic maneuvering.

Physicalists gave up the little of representation they were going to with Kant's priors and perceptionists generally hold that there is always an independent

factual (albeit sometimes trivial) expression available to reconcile perceptual differences.

The Conclusion of Interpretation

Interpretation concludes at a definable moment for the first pair. This moment is defined as that of sensation and of cognition respectively. The definitive character of the moment is a significant division for at its conclusion the interpretation passes from consequent to antecedent. As an antecedent it is the motive for subsequent behavior. It is this theoretical moment upon which the whole effect literature hangs.

There is no such moment for most of the remaining theorists. Interpretation is an emerging process not an instant. Its activity certainly subsides but need never end. Interpretations are not the independent cause of some subsequent action rather they are accommodated within the larger performances of ideology or everyday life. (Under this rubric, one does not stop at a traffic light because it is red, but because one is driving).

A Subsidence

An exploration of theorizing communities runs a number of risks not the least of which is the fundamental lie that there are necessarily centers to be explored. I recognize my own essentializing moves here, nonetheless, interpretation stands as a significant issue across which substantial divisions can be traced. We as a community of scholars (and as an Association) do stand divided in practical ways which affect our ability to normalize our scholarship. Perhaps that is a happy conclusion.

Footnotes

[1]And sometimes more darkly by racial characteristics. See Anderson, (1992).

[2]The word agent is used in both senses of the term: Agent as a participating cause in its own right and agent as a representative, here of collective interests.

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